

The Yes Men Fix the World

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Film Annotation #5

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705 Words

Title, director and release year?

The Yes Men Fix the World is a 2009 political satire documentary directed by Andy Bichlbaum and Mike Bonanno, who are the two core members of the Yes Men, themselves.

What is the central argument or narrative of the film?

This film works to create a unifying narrative throughout, but ultimately what it consists of is a loosely related group of "cultural hacks" and performances that offer commentary. The unifying narrative is that if big corporations are people, they ought to be held accountable for their actions and those impacts on society.

How is the argument or narrative made and sustained? (Use concrete examples from the film to illustrate.)

The Yes Men make the argument by showing the failing of a particular organization, and then often times doing what the corporation ought to have done in the first place. The most significant example of this is when The Yes Men defraud their way onto BBC to take responsibility for DOW Chemical's involvement in the Bhopal chemical disaster which killed thousands and endangered tens of thousands of residents in India. In posing as DOW spokesmen, they turn the spotlight on an issue that has been swept under the rug and show how DOW should be held accountable for its actions.

What sustainability issues did you spot? Identify and explain each. (Examples - Political, Legal, Economic, Technological, Media, Organizational, Educational, Behavioral, Cultural, Ecological)

A number of different sustainability issues are touched on in this film. Political issues are touched on later in the film where The Yes Men shed light on how New Orleans residents have been forced out of their housing by local government. The Yes Men also examine large corporations like DOW, BP and Exxon which touches on economic and organizational issues as well. The Yes Men also get at cultural issues showing the jaded citizens of NYC being shocked and overjoyed at their fake edition of *The New York*

Times. Lastly, one overarching theme is climate change and big corporations culpability which is ecological in nature.

What parts of the film did you find most persuasive and/or compelling?

I found the corporations and audiences reactions to The Yes Men's performance art to be the most compelling. Seeing grown men speak candidly about the horrors of their endeavors because The Yes Men have invited such dialogue is very jarring and cuts to the core of many of these issues. The callousness of the corporations' response to their performances is eye opening as well.

Does the film have emotional appeal to you? Why? (Use concrete examples from the film to illustrate.)

The film does have emotional appeal on certain issues in particular. For example, when discussing the Bhopal chemical spill, they show original news footage from the disaster and visit with victims which shows the extent to which these communities and marginalized people were affected by these corporations' relentless pursuit of profit

Does the film rely more on science or emotion? (How does the film balance the scientific argument and the emotional argument?)

The film relies on historical events to motivate the "hacks" that The Yes Men construct which have comedic and emotional appeal. Additionally, a fair amount of the film relies on the characters' unstated value system which I feel is a weakness of the film.

Does the film want you to do something? If the film does suggest action, do you think it is a good idea? Will the suggested action help?

The film closes with the artists distributing a fake edition of *The New York Times* with the headlines and stories they would like to see. The reaction is very positive, and the point they make is that "if these are the headlines people want to see, we can work together and make it happen". The central call to action here is to be optimistic and work together, but this is a pretty vague call to action. What does that actually look

like, in practice? I think it's a noble goal but it's difficult enough to motivate people to take action let alone ask them to determine what that action actually is. I do feel we could all use some more optimism, though.

Are there other actions that are not suggested that should be taken?

I think that they should be more specific in how we can implement their vision. They could suggest getting involved in local activism, writing letters to local and national politicians, and other efforts. I also think they could probably advocate for the victims of the various disasters they cover financially by recommending a fund or an organization that does relief for those affected by the disasters they mention.

What was the target audience for this film? Why?

I believe the target audience for the film was popular culture, focusing on left-leaning people and younger audiences in general. You have to accept some unstated premises that the film has about economics and environmental issues (which I happen to agree with), but they don't too much to convince you of these things up front, which is why left-leaning viewers will accept these premises more easily.